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ABSTRACT

The Huntsville (Alabama) City School System has proposed continuance of a separate facility, the Delinquency Prevention Center, to which students may be transferred when their conduct indicates that they cannot be maintained in the normal school environment. Objectives of such a program include providing the assigned child with individual attention so that he may be returned to school in the shortest possible time. The student admitted to the Center is evaluated so that the learning disability can be identified and remediated. Activities of the Center include organizing a parent program. (SBH)

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DELINQUENCY PREVENTION CENTER PROGRAM

by Mary Jane Caylor

One of the basic premises of education is that it must serve the greatest possible number of students in as efficient a manner as is possible under existing circumstances. Therefore, when a youngster is of such a disposition as to be uncontrollable within the normal educational environment then that youngster must be removed in order to allow his peers their rightful opportunity to receive a quality education, but in recognizing that the majority must be served as best is possible under the circumstances the city school board also recognizes that there must be an attempt made to reach those that cannot be handled within the "normal" educational environment.

From research of court records, it was found that of students expelled prior to the inception of the Delinquency Prevention Center, 15.38% were actually judged delinquent during the school year in which they were expelled. This did not include any status offenses such as ungovernable, runaway, or truancy. This rate of delinquency for expelled students is much higher than the approximate 2% of juvenile cases filed (not judged delinquent) against the normal school population. These statistics confirm that students expelled from school and being left "on the streets" have a much higher rate of delinquency than students involved in educational programs.

By identifying behavioral problems and providing an alternative to expulsion for these students, it is possible to divert potential adjudicated delinquents from the already "bottlenecked" juvenile justice system. This serves both the community and the potentially expelled students by protecting the community and helping keep these students from a more potentially harmful situation.

In recognition of this problem, we propose to the Alabama Law Enforcement Planning Agency that we act in concert to continue to provide a focused educational opportunity to those who must be removed from the normal educational environment prior to their being expelled from the system. By continuing to provide for this "last ditch effort" we feel that the community will continue to be served because it has been a recognized and established fact for a great number of years that when juveniles are expelled from a school system and permitted to roam the city streets at will that there is a much greater likelihood of their becoming involved in matters that will place them shortly in the criminal justice system than if they had remained within the school environment.

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Specifically, the Huntsville City School System proposes to continue a separate facility to which youngsters may be transferred when their conduct indicates that they cannot be maintained in the normal school environment. This separate

facility is staffed with professionals in the field of behavior and learning disorders, and there is a lower teacher to student ratio within the facility.

The objective of the facility, and the personnel staffing it, is to give to the youngster assigned to the facility a greater measure of individual attention to his particular difficulties, and provide a coordinated effort to allow the individual to adjust, and be returned in the shortest possible time frame to the normal school environment.

The percentage of students adjudicated delinquent (other than status offenses) during the school year following admission to the Delinquency Prevention Center is 7.89% compared to 15.38% for students who were expelled prior to the inception of D.P.C. and less than 2% for the normal school population. The specific goal of the D.P.C. is to maintain a level under 7.89% by continuing to divert students from expulsion proceedings to the D.P.C. Program.

Special objectives include the following:

1. Reduce the recidivism rate of permanent phase-back students from the present level of 12% to less than 10%.
2. Obtain more community involvement in the program by organizing a coordinated effort by people in the community to work with DPC students outside of school hours and during the summer.
3. An average of 50.11 volunteer hours have been given by community volunteers doing work in tutoring and recreation with DPC students. Students benefit from this involvement with positive role models, therefore, a 25% increase in the average number of volunteer hours per month to 62.64 hours per month will be an objective.
4. The average length of stay at DPC for students who were recommended for permanent phase-back is 72.71 school days. A reduction of 15% to 61.80 days will be our objective.

The primary method to be utilized is the identification of a prospective client for the facility by the principal of the school in which the youngster is located. The request for transfer to the Delinquency Prevention Center is forwarded to the project director, and be reviewed by appropriate administrative staff of the city school system. If there is a consensus that the principal's recommendation is to be followed then the student will be assigned to the Delinquency Prevention Center, and treatment begun.

On arrival at the Delinquency Prevention Center, there is a full program of testing so that the true nature of the learning disability can be identified so that the proper remedial measures can be appropriately effectuated to permit the shortest possible stay within the Delinquency Prevention Center, and to permit an early return to the normal school environment, (if that is at all possible). If it is possible for the youngster to be re-admitted to the normal school environment then this will have the effect of having one less juvenile on the streets, and not under educational supervision. It is understood that prior to a principal's making recommendation for transfer to the Delinquency Prevention Center that every possible avenue will have been explored, and that this recommendation for transfer to the Delinquency Prevention Center would have been paramount to a recommendation for expulsion to the City Board of Education had not the Delinquency Prevention Center been in operation. We plan to serve approximately 30 to 45 students each semester, with a staff of three (3) teachers, one (1) coordinator and one (1) aide on a ratio of about 1 to 12 or 1 to 8 for the project period. Also included is one (1) secretary.

Additional Activities:

- Work with police and familiarize them with DPC program working through Juvenile Detention Division.
- Continue working agreement with Family Court, Juvenile Division with regard to students also known to juvenile court.
- Continue working agreement with Madison County Mental Health Center concerning students who are known to Mental Health and DPC.
- Continue working agreement with DPS concerning students who are known to DPS and DPC.
- Work with State Rehabilitation Services to become familiar with full scope of services available, and help students who may be eligible for services to obtain them, e.t., physical disabilities, speech and hearing tests and therapy, diagnostic services, etc.
- Organize parent program for parents of students.
    - child management.
    - agreement as to procedure in case of violent behavior.
    - speakers from Special Education, Juvenile Court, Mental Health.

As previously stated a transfer to the Delinquency Prevention Center will be an action which would have been paramount to expulsion if the Delinquency Prevention Center were not in service. Therefore, the success or fail rate of the Delinquency Prevention Center is evaluated on the number of students assigned to the Center and the number of students re-assigned to the normal school environment without having to be expelled by the city school board.

Statistics of the 1975/76 school year will be compiled comparing the number of juveniles being brought before the court for disruptive behaviors in school for this period with the number brought before the court for disruptive behavior in school the year preceding the inception of the Delinquency Prevention Center program.

Statistics will be compiled by the Department of Pupil Personnel of the Huntsville City Schools regarding the average number of students expelled in the three (3) years preceding the inception of the Delinquency Prevention Center program and the number expelled in the 1975/76 school term.

The Family Court, Juvenile Division, will provide statistics on the average number of students judged delinquent who have been expelled prior to the inception of the Delinquency Prevention Center program. This will be compared to the number of students taking part in the Delinquency Prevention Center program who are judged delinquent in 1975 school year.

Statistics will be compiled showing the number of students who have dropped out of school, and the percentage of that number who have been judged delinquent.